

Buffalo Oct. 2^d 1835

Mr Smith

To Gerrit Smith

Utica Convention

Dear Sir,

Although not personally acquainted with you, yet knowing well the interest you have taken in one form or another in the Cause of the colored people, bond & free, I venture to address you freely & familiarly in reference to the Convention to be held at Utica, Oct 21st, for the purpose of forming a New York State Anti-Slavery Society. My object of course is to urge your attendance & cooperation at that Convention. I am aware of the positions you have heretofore taken & the reasons that have hitherto prevented your cooperation with the friends of Immediate Emancipation, & yet I cannot but hope that by this time some of your difficulties may have been removed, or at least so far removed, or so much overbalanced by difficulties of a similar character on the other side of the question, that you will be ready to cast in your lot & "sink or swim" with us.

I had hoped to have the pleasure of a personal interview with you before the Convention, but as that seems to be out of the question, you will not take it amiss I am sure, if I take this method to suggest to you some of the reasons which seem to me to urge upon you the duty of Cooperation with us — especially at the present crisis.

1. Your influence. This I happen to know from personal conversation with many individuals, who ask, "Well how is Gerrit Smith on this subject?" is very great, throughout Central & Western New York, to say nothing of other sections of the Country. And the greater your influence, the greater your obligation to make it felt on the right side of this & every similar question, & the greater your guilt if you

do not. Indeed no guilt can be greater than that of those who neither enter into the kingdom of heaven themselves, nor suffer those that are entering & but for them would enter, to enter in. In this you will not disagree with me.

2. In every Cause, like the one in question, there are crises in its progress, at which, silence, neutrality, or a refusal to act with the friends of that Cause, is in fact & effect joining hands & acting with ~~its~~ enemies - Crises, at which it may be said with strict & literal truth that "he that is not for us is against us." You cannot fail to see that the Anti-Slavery Cause has reached just such a crisis - that the whole Community are being divided for or against it, & that all who do not avow themselves for it are reckoned as against it.

3. Such crises are the times at which men of influence may turn their influence to the greatest account. by throwing it on the right side. At such a time as the present, for instance, if a man deserts the Cause and abjures his principles he does us more harm than he could if he were to do it at any other time. And on the other hand, if he stands firm he does us more good. So if a man, like yourself for instance, espouse the Cause at such time, ~~your~~ ^{his} influence is worth more to it than it could be, if given to it at any other time. The blow that is struck is more deeply & extensively felt. For it is seen at once, that at such a time, & in the face of such opposition, ~~you~~ ^{he} could not & would come out & stake ~~your~~ ^{his} stand & venture ~~your~~ ^{his} character & reputation on the issue, if ~~then~~ he were not sure we were in the right & that some interests of vast importance were in jeopardy.

4. The influence of Central & Western N. York on the Country at large, on any such moral question, is incalculable. ~~I know of~~

The public mind in this section is now in a plastic state. If the friends of God & human rights would come out boldly on the subject in question, the public mind could be gained to the cause of Immediate Emancipation with perfect ease. And I know of no one man whose influence would do more to bring them out than yours, were you to take your stand with us, & you never can take it, as I have said, with more of advantage to the Cause, than now.

5. The opposition which assails the Anti-Slavery Cause is not specific in its character or its object. It is altogether generic. It is wickedness in Church & State marshalling its forces against all pure, thorough-going & radical reform, & therefore against each specific instance of such reform. And it is an opposition, which if not met, will sweep away truth & righteousness from the land, & bring into Church & State corruption as deep & awful & God-provoking as ever crept into the nation of the Jews, filling up the measure of their iniquity & ripening them for destruction. What then is our position now? - This - Thousands & tens of thousands of the most devoted, praying, working Christians of the land have embarked in the Anti-Slavery Cause. They are charged with being indiscreet, rash, & headlong in their movement, Thousands of the good & great either make the change, or by their silence & their refusal to cooperate say Amen to it. These are in the Church. Wickedness out of the Church, & in some cases in it, emboldened by the good company in which it finds itself rallies its forces for the onrush, & bears down upon ~~them~~^{us} with all its energies & all its fury. What is to be the issue? One of two things - Victory or defeat. If victory, well. If defeat - what then? The friends of truth & right & God are disheartened, & wickedness emboldened by conquest, moves on to new victories & the day hastens when the rights & privileges, civil & religious, of the friends of reform are swept away, or held only on permission of a corrupt, sin-loving & God-hating mobocracy. First the Sabbath Enterprise is met with defeat - next the

effort for Moral Reform - next the Anti-Slavery effort - and
next - yet, next the Temperance effort, on the recent pledge -
next, protracted & inquiring meetings - next evening meetings -
next, in short, everything that effectually disturbs or checks the
~~slow~~ onward progress of sin. Once let our enterprise meet with
defeat, & another example is furnished - another precedent estab-
lished to show the wicked that they have only to put on a bold
front & move on with a determined step & they can bear down
any Moral reform that is attempted in the land. Indeed the work
is already beginning in relation to the Temperance cause, since
its adoption of the recent pledge. The forces are already mar-
shalling for an onset upon that, & only let wickedness without
secure to itself a little more of the countenance within the church
which it is now securing, & the onsets will come. No man
who is familiar with the state of things in the Community, or
who marks the signs of the times in regard to the Temperance
cause can doubt it. At such a time then, to say nothing now
of the effect of a defeat, on the ~~final abolition~~ prospects of the slave,
what is it your duty & every man's duty to do? Why to gird him
to the fight. And what if he does not quite like the uniform of
his fellow soldiers? Why gird him to the fight & make common
cause against the common enemy. And if ~~on a certain~~
at a certain crisis of affairs Washington gave direction, if any
man was seen stepping out of the ranks or turning his back on
the enemy, to shoot him down, what must our guilt be, if in this
moral conflict, we fail to stand in our lot & breast ourselves to
the onset? And especially so, when the question is one which is
evidently the test question of the age, ~~and~~ in and nation?
& when success in it would, under God, ~~show us that~~ give us so
much of moral power & moral courage & steadfastness of principle
that we should be able to grapple it successfully with every other sin

that prevails in the Community?

And then again the effect of a defeat on the prospects of the slave. His doom is sealed, at least until he can redress himself.

And then the state of things at the South - the positions taken - positions which shut us out from action in the district of Columbia & which go the whole length of taking from us freedom of speech & the press - the bullying & bravado - these all need to be met by a firm & manly stand on the part of the friends of man & God. At such a time especially the "God of the oppressed" expects every man to do his duty. And in reference to our stand at such times emphatically will the final Judge say "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these my brethren ye did it not to me."

I need not multiply considerations - these that I have now mentioned & others will readily suggest them to your mind. It was to the last to which I wished particularly to direct your thoughts; for sure I am that the opposition is generic & not specific & called into existence by the imprudences &c which it seizes upon & urges as its justification.

And now, dear Sir, what if coming forth & making common cause with us, you should find the conflict a desperate one with the generous devotion of La Fayette to another, but not a better cause, I trust you will be ready to say "The more desperate the cause the greater need has it of my services."

You will excuse the familiarity with which I have written. It was only in perfect confidence that you would do so that I ventured to write at all - Yours with much respect

Amos A Phelps -

First Draft of a
Letter
to
Genl Smith Esq.
Peterboro, N. Y.
Oct 3^d 1835

Buffalo